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SUMMARY RECORD OF THE 61st MEETING

Chairman: Ms. ROTHEISER (Austria)
(Vice-Chairman)

Chairman of the Advisory Committee on Administrative and Budgetary Questions: Mr. MSELLE

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The meeting was called to order at 3.30 p.m.

AGENDA ITEM 103: REVIEW OF THE EFFICIENCY OF THE ADMINISTRATIVE AND FINANCIAL FUNCTIONING OF THE UNITED NATIONS (continued)

AGENDA ITEM 104: PROGRAMME BUDGET FOR THE BIENNIUM 1992-1993 (continued)

Revised estimates resulting from the restructuring of the Secretariat (continued) (A/C.5/47/88 and A/47/7/Add.15; A/C.5/47/92)

General debate (continued)

1. Mr. MONGBE (Benin) thanked the Secretary-General for the revised estimates contained in document A/C.5/47/88, submitted pursuant to General Assembly resolution 47/212. His delegation fully supported the position of the Group of 77 in that regard. The Secretary-General, as the Chief Administrative Officer of the United Nations, should receive all the support necessary for carrying out the reforms needed to respond to the rapid changes in international relations. As the Controller and other speakers had pointed out, a number of General Assembly resolutions could serve as a basis for the adoption of decisions on the subject that would reflect the aspirations of various Member States and political and geographical groups. Every decision on the revitalization or rationalization of intergovernmental economic and social structures should be based on General Assembly resolutions 41/232, 46/235 and 47/212.

2. Benin supported all measures for strengthening the economic and social structures of the Secretariat, particularly the mechanisms for implementing the United Nations New Agenda for the Development of Africa in the 1990s (UN-NADAF), and the Programme of Action for the Least Developed Countries for the 1990s. As those mechanisms had to confront extremely difficult problems, their position on the organizational chart should be upgraded in line with their importance. In any case, Africa and the least developed countries hoped that no reform of the United Nations system would be carried out to its detriment. For that reason, his delegation hoped for assurances that the functions of the structures dealing with coordinating programmes concerning those countries would be better defined and upgraded. Generally speaking, there was a need to clarify the whole context and conception of the restructuring process of the Secretariat and to have a general picture of the restructuring exercise together with a timetable for its implementation.

3. The Secretary-General's document contained useful and important proposals such as the one on the establishment of three new economic, social and related departments at United Nations Headquarters. His delegation agreed with the Advisory Committee that it would be advisable to ensure effective and efficient economic and social coordination between the new departments on the one hand and other United Nations offices such as those at Geneva, Vienna and Nairobi on the other hand. As for decentralization, he welcomed the Secretary-General's intention to strengthen the role and contribution of the regional commissions and hoped that those commissions would help the groups of States interested in implementing economic integration policies.

4. As for the Secretary-General's proposal concerning the four Assistant Secretary-General posts in the Department of Administration and Management, the

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advice of the Advisory Committee to postpone every decision on the subject in order to take into account the comments that the General Assembly might wish to make thereon was a wise one.

5. In view of the eloquent presentation of the case by the Chairman of the Group of 77, it seemed pointless to stress that the proposal to appoint United Nations representatives with political functions had met with considerable reticence and even disapproval from many delegations. In that connection, it would be better to maintain the current mandate of the Resident Coordinator.

6. Mr. ELZIMAITY (Egypt) said that broadly speaking the report of the Advisory Committee (A/47/7/Add.15) reflected his delegation's position on the report of the Secretary-General as well as its view of what the second phase of the restructuring of the Secretariat should be and the methods that should be used to bring it into practice. He also agreed fully with the declarations made on that subject by the Chairman of the Group of 77 which reflected the concern and position of the developing countries in general. Moreover, the restructuring process must be implemented in accordance with the provisions of General Assembly resolutions 41/213, 45/264, 46/235 and 47/212.

7. His delegation did not quite understand how the proposed organizational and structural changes related to the proposed reallocation of resources nor how implementation of approved programmes could be improved. Nevertheless, the creation of three new departments provided a good opportunity for improving the economic role of the United Nations with a view to fulfilling one of its main purposes and objectives, namely "the promotion of economic and social advancement of all peoples". Moreover, adaptation to new circumstances and the adjustments of its organizational structures and processes should be permanent features of a sound organization. Restructuring could also help to overcome the tendency to develop programmes in isolation from each other and to create new Secretariat entities whenever new agendas were adopted.

8. His delegation supported the framework proposed by the Secretary-General, but would rely on the preparation and presentation of the budget for the biennium 1994-1995 in order to discuss a number of important issues relating to restructuring. However, he stressed that priority must be given to technical cooperation and added that the arrangements for incorporating the Office for Project Services were vital for maintaining and increasing its autonomy and efficiency. His delegation also supported an increased role for the regional commissions.

9. Another area where changes would be needed in preparation of the budget for the period 1994-1995 was the procedure to be followed by the Secretariat for drawing up a report containing the United Nations views on the state of the world. The report should be descriptive and policy-setting and should address the main problems facing the international community, such as racism, poverty, intolerance and economic disarray. The document before the Committee gave no clear indication of the Secretary-General's intentions thereon.

10. The transfer to Geneva of activities related to science and technology could be beneficial for the developing countries. With that in view, a unit of adequate size, headed by an official at the appropriate level, would be needed to enable the United Nations to play a prominent role in that area. Decentralization of functions and activities to the regional commissions should

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be accompanied by a review of the functioning of the commissions aimed at enhancing their efficiency.

11. His delegation would have welcomed clearer indications of the relationship between the proposed restructuring and the priorities adopted by the General Assembly, particularly the question of the economic and social development of Africa, which should be given top priority in United Nations programmes. Furthermore, no provision had been made during the present phase of restructuring for the intergovernmental mechanism for economic and social development. Nevertheless, certain changes might be needed, for example with regard to supplementing the programmes of the Economic and Social Council and the Trade and Development Board, as well as in connection with the functions of various commissions and committees, including the Commission for Social Development. The measures taken to improve the efficiency of the Secretariat appeared to be in the right direction, but failed to address many issues, such as the redistribution of posts, the need for greater staff mobility, the mobilization of the Secretariat towards clear and universal goals and the continuation of dialogue and consultations with Member States.

12. Special emphasis should be placed on a number of points. First, the General Assembly had decided that priority in the execution of programmes should be given to the least developed countries and the isolated reference in document A/C.5/47/88 to that priority as the responsibility of the Department of Development Support and Management Services should not be misleading. Second, a new description was needed of the functions of the Department of Economic and Social Information and Policy Analysis, in strict compliance with the limits imposed by the Charter and the General Assembly, since many delegations felt that the current description might constitute a violation of the sovereignty of Member States. Third, his delegation did not support the initiative to appoint "United Nations representatives" and, in any case, felt that consideration of the matter should be deferred since there was still no consensus thereon, in spite of the remarks in paragraph 63 of the report of the Secretary-General (A/C.5/47/88).

13. With regard to the Department of Administration and Management, his delegation found it difficult to support the decision to downgrade the four existing Assistant Secretary-General posts, particularly those of the chief of the Office of Human Resources Management and the Controller, and did not believe that the proposal to create a D-3 post should be linked to downgrading the four Assistant Secretary-General posts. His delegation agreed with the opinion expressed by the Advisory Committee in paragraphs 45 to 47 of its report concerning the failure to provide a clear explanation for the creation of a D-3 post, the incumbent of which might be seen as a "second-class Assistant Secretary-General", thereby diminishing authority in vital areas of administration and control. The matter required careful consideration, notably by the International Civil Service Commission.

14. His delegation fully shared the Advisory Committee's opinion that it was extremely urgent for the restructuring process to deal with the question of the Field Operations Division and for everything possible to be done to strengthen that important division. It also agreed on the need to coordinate activities concerning the management and administration of peace-keeping so as to improve their planning and budgeting. His delegation also shared the opinion expressed in paragraph 7 of the report of the Advisory Committee, cautioning against

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over-reliance on external consultants when it would be more appropriate to make use of the vast and far-reaching expertise of United Nations staff. Finally, his delegation fully supported the Secretary-General's efforts to enhance the function of the Secretariat and improve its performance, in order to respond to the rapid changes taking place in the world.

15. Mr. CHUINKAM (Cameroon), after acknowledging the Secretary-General's efforts to improve the efficiency of the administrative and financial performance of the United Nations, said that General Assembly resolution 47/212 stressed that the restructuring of the Secretariat should be in conformity with the objectives and guidelines/principles set out in resolution 46/232 and in close consultation with Member States and relevant intergovernmental bodies. However, the fact that those bodies had not been duly consulted had reduced the Committee's ability to take an informed decision on such an important issue.

16. Turning to the report of the Secretary-General (A/C.5/47/88), he noted that paragraph 40 (a) appeared to suggest that equal treatment would be given to the least developed countries and to the countries with economies in transition, as if they were at the same level of development, while relegating the problems of other developing countries to the background. In addition, it was clear from paragraph 83 of the report that the resources had not been allocated by subprogrammes in a detailed manner and that the resources would be flexibly managed to accommodate the priority requirements of the three new departments for the rest of the year. Because it was not yet clear what tasks each department or unit would perform, it was difficult to determine whether the resources allocated were adequate. Assurances were needed to show that implementation of mandated programmes would not be adversely affected and, in particular, there was a need to strengthen the unit responsible for implementing the United Nations New Agenda for the Development of Africa in the 1990s and the Programme of Action for the Least Developed Countries for the 1990s.

17. His delegation considered that, in defining the functions of the new Department of Economic and Social Information and Policy Analysis, efforts should be made to avoid any perception by Member States that their sovereignty might be violated.

18. The Secretary-General had indicated that there was a growing consensus on the need for a unified United Nations presence and approach at country level, and had seen the selection of United Nations representatives, who would also act as resident coordinators for the United Nations system, as a key to more effective coordination. He (Mr. Chuinkam) pointed out that no consensus had yet been reached on that matter and that his delegation would be reluctant to agree to any political functions being assigned to the United Nations representative in its country.

19. His delegation supported the proposal to decentralize certain activities and posts from Headquarters to the regional commissions, but believed that a skeleton technical staff should be maintained at Headquarters. It also supported the observations of the Chairman of the Group of 77 relating to the status of the units in UNCTAD that would be concerned with transnational corporations and science and technology, and concerning the need for the post of head of the International Trade Centre to be filled as soon as possible at the Assistant Secretary-General level.

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20. Lastly, he endorsed the observations and recommendations in paragraphs 41 to 48 of the Advisory Committee's report (A/47/7/Add.15) and cautioned against the negative effect which a protracted restructuring exercise would have on staff morale.

21. Mr. MORCZYNSKI (Poland) said that his delegation shared the view that there was a need to enhance the effectiveness of the economic and social sectors of the Secretariat and supported the Secretary-General's work in achieving that objective; it was pleased to see that, in the mandates and activities of the new departments, the need was stressed to give particular attention to developing countries and countries with economies in transition. It hoped that the restructuring process would not adversely affect the preparations for a world summit for social development, where decisions might be taken that would require the creation of new structures. A cautious approach should therefore be taken to the restructuring of activities in the social sector.

22. His delegation supported the Secretary-General's proposal for the transfer to UNCTAD of posts that were concerned with transnational corporations and science and technology for development. That move was in the direction outlined at the eighth session of UNCTAD, held at Cartagena, and might require changes in the intergovernmental structure of the United Nations as well.

23. His delegation was deeply concerned that it had not been possible for the revised estimates to reflect the comments and recommendations of the Committee for Programme and Coordination; it fully supported the Advisory Committee's observation on that matter. Lastly, he noted that at first sight the cost savings resulting from the restructuring exercise were disappointing; his delegation hoped that detailed financial information would be provided for each programme budget section to serve as a basis for a well-founded opinion on that issue.

24. Mr. KALPAGE (Sri Lanka) said that although the Secretary-General, as the "chief administrative officer of the Organization", was responsible for management of the Secretariat, in that capacity he had to follow the guidelines contained in General Assembly resolutions, particularly those on restructuring, including resolutions 46/232 and 47/212. The Secretary-General had noted, in paragraph 7 of his report (A/C.5/47/88), that "restructuring is (...) aimed at a more responsive, cost-effective, streamlined Secretariat, comprising organizational units with more focused and precise terms of reference and clear lines of responsibility and accountability". His delegation agreed with those aims, but also endorsed the observations of the Chairman of the Group of 77 that the mandate and priorities agreed to by the General Assembly must be maintained unaltered and that there was a need for a restructured Secretariat to provide substantive support for intergovernmental machinery and to strengthen technical cooperation.

25. The Department of Economic and Social Development, which had been established a year before to provide coherence and avoid duplication, was being divided into three different departments: the Department for Policy Coordination and Sustainable Development, the Department of Economic and Social Information and Policy Analysis and the Department of Development Support and Management Services. In order to facilitate assessing the restructuring exercise, more details of the components, structure and operation of those

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departments were needed. His delegation agreed with the Advisory Committee that more justification was needed concerning the transfer of functions and posts between duty stations with regard to activities pertaining to social development and the advancement of women, the World Food Council, transnational corporations, science and technology for development and the peaceful uses of outer space. It also shared the view that the Secretary-General's proposals in the economic and social sectors gave rise to questions concerning the required coordination and hoped that more detailed information would be provided on the discharge of responsibilities formerly entrusted to the Director-General.

26. Although the Secretary-General's efforts to streamline the senior management structure of the Secretariat were to be welcomed, there was a need for objective classification criteria for high-level posts. The proposal to create a D-3 level and to downgrade four Assistant Secretary-General posts must be reconsidered. His delegation was concerned about the proposal to abolish the post of the Executive Director of the United Nations Centre for Human Settlements (Habitat) which could be a setback for implementing the Global Strategy for Shelter to the Year 2000, because, in order to achieve the objectives of the strategy, high-level support was required from the Secretariat. The Centre had the responsibility, inter alia, to provide support to Member States in the execution of technical cooperation projects for over $65 million per biennium, and the Executive Director's post had to be maintained at the Assistant Secretary-General level.

27. Restructuring the Secretariat was only one aspect of restructuring the United Nations system, a process which was being carried out in a spirit of cooperation. Restructuring and revitalizing the economic and social sectors of the United Nations was in progress in the Second and Third Committees, while a working group of the General Assembly was dealing with various aspects of "An Agenda for Peace", and the President of the General Assembly had set in motion the process of revitalizing the General Assembly. All those efforts should be seen not as compartmentalized operations but as a single integrated whole. The streamlining of Secretariat activities in the economic and social sectors should reinforce the restructuring and revitalizing process carried out by the General Assembly in accordance with resolution 45/264.

28. Mr. HICKS (United States of America) said that the United Nations must play a central role in addressing global problems and that, to that end, long overdue reforms must be implemented, and at the same time Member States must make a commitment to meet their financial obligations to the United Nations. Over the past three years, the United States had significantly improved its payment record, and in 1992, over 38 per cent of all the assessed funds collected by the United Nations had represented contributions by the United States. The Clinton Administration was firmly committed to meeting United States obligations to the United Nations.

29. Representatives of Member States must ensure maximum return on their contributions and must demonstrate that United Nations programmes and operations were relevant and cost-effective. At a time of austerity, no less could be expected from the United Nations.

30. The revised budget estimates for the biennium 1992-1993 represented a significant departure from traditional approaches, which often failed to produce results. A major step had been taken towards integrating economic, social and

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environmental issues to ensure greater coherence in policy formulation and programme implementation. The reorganization plan also emphasized the importance of achieving effective coordination of the agencies and programmes of the United Nations system and the decentralization of decision-making and resources. While the process was not yet complete, it was moving in the right direction.

31. One of the key objectives of restructuring had been to achieve greater coherence in policy-making and integration of the major aspects of the development process. The consolidation of previously separate organizational entities should lead to improved programme delivery. However, responsibility for economic and social questions had been shared among three departments, each headed by an Under-Secretary-General, whereas it would have been preferable to hold onto those questions under the supervision of a single under-secretary-general. His concern was not related simply to the number of high-level posts being established, but rather to the possibility that the proposed structure might not ensure the necessary coordination and cooperation. With regard to technical assistance, the Secretary-General intended to assume responsibility for the operation of the Office for Project Services and to merge its functions with those of the former Department of Technical Cooperation for Development. Given the success which the Office had achieved under the management of UNDP, his delegation questioned the proposal and recommended that the advice of the UNDP Governing Council should be sought before a final decision was taken on the future of the Office.

32. The proposals to restructure the Secretariat were not accompanied by changes in the venues of related intergovernmental bodies and, given that resolution 40/243 required that intergovernmental bodies should meet at the headquarters of their respective substantive secretariat units, a number of bodies might experience increased travel expenses and problems in providing services, if the General Assembly accepted the proposed plan. The General Assembly should therefore take the measures necessary to change the venues of the bodies concerned. He asked the Secretariat to provide the Committee with a list of the intergovernmental bodies involved, indicating the changes in venues that had to be approved by the General Assembly and the resulting financial implications.

33. The proposals before the Committee did not address the nature and substance of specific United Nations programmes, and the report of the Secretary-General pointed out that the programmes contained in the medium-term plan and in the budget for the biennium 1992-1993 would be carried out as approved. There was no point in rearranging the structure of the United Nations unless its programmes and activities were also changed. He had noted on several occasions that much of the output of the United Nations, particularly in the economic, social and environmental sectors, did not address the needs of Member States and that an excessive share of resources would remain allocated to servicing meetings, producing reports for intergovernmental bodies, and issuing technical or statistical publications. Many of those products were necessary and useful, but a large number of them were not. It was to be hoped that the budget for 1994-1995 would contain programme proposals which represented a dramatic departure from previous practice.

34. Restructuring should also lead to a rationalization of the distribution of staff within the Secretariat. New structures and working methods that

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eliminated duplication, redundancies and ineffective activities would create the staff resources required to meet new priorities. The Secretary-General's plans did not go far enough in that direction. In addition, the revised estimates did not seem to take account of the rapidly increasing responsibilities of the United Nations in peace-keeping, peacemaking, human rights and humanitarian assistance. Much greater staff redeployment would be needed for that purpose and he hoped that it would be proposed in the next budget. Once the new structures were in place, a very thorough assessment of the staff levels of each department must be conducted to achieve the necessary reallocation of resources.

35. He expressed concern at the Secretary-General's proposal to establish a new D-3 staff category. Before doing so, the Secretary-General should explain what problems were associated with Assistant Secretary-General posts and how they would be resolved by the establishment of D-3 posts. Unless Member States clearly understood the need for such posts, the United Nations ran the risk of creating a new bureaucratic layer which might complicate existing lines of authority. Furthermore, his delegation felt that the vast expansion of the Organization's programmes and resources justified retention of the Assistant Secretary-General grade for the post of United Nations Controller. The Committee could resolve the matter without establishing a new category. The two other posts proposed for the D-3 category did not merit such a grade level and the funding for them should therefore be deleted.

36. He expressed his Government's deep concern at the fact that a large number of officials whose posts were financed from the Organization's resources were not subject to the provisions of the Staff Regulations and Rules. That situation constituted a serious lapse in policies and procedures aimed at ensuring the highest standards of integrity and competence and should be rectified as soon as possible. His delegation therefore proposed that, at its forty-seventh session, the General Assembly should adopt the necessary regulations to remedy the situation, which should cover all individuals receiving compensation from the United Nations.

37. His delegation appreciated the Secretary-General's efforts to formulate an integrated approach to development questions and, while it had difficulties with certain aspects of the plan, it was prepared to accept the proposals on the understanding that further refinements would be offered if necessary. It was also prepared to accept the revised estimates on the understanding that the reform and restructuring process would continue. Much remained to be done to rationalize the work and staffing levels of each department and office in the Secretariat. All programmes, particularly those which reflected initiatives of the Secretariat, required thorough review to ensure that resources were allocated to activities which contributed to resolving the serious problems currently facing the world. As Member States placed greater reliance on the United Nations and considered larger investments in programmes such as peace-keeping and peacemaking, steps must be taken to build confidence in the Organization's operational effectiveness. The Fifth Committee's recommendations on the revised estimates must therefore include the necessary guidance on the next stages of reform.

The meeting rose at 4.40 p.m.